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In Search of a Good Drink: Punches, Cocktails, and Imperial Consumption

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In Search of a Good Drink: Punches, Cocktails, and Imperial Consumption

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Abstract

In Search of a Good Drink: Punches, Cocktails, and Imperial Consumption

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This report examines the relationship between forms of domestic alcohol consumption and the histories of global capitalism—specifically, the shift from punches to cocktails as the most popular form of hard alcohol consumption. It argues that punches served to direct the products of the periphery into the metropole and that cocktails exist only as a direct result of American engagement with global markets. The availability of new, exotic ingredients from colonial holdings allowed particular kinds of consumption clusters to form in European societies; these newfound tastes then fueled further expansion, as in Sidney Mintz's analysis of sugar and capitalism. The growing institution of the bar encouraged individual forms of drinking, leading to the downfall of punch and the ascendance of cocktails.

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Jerry Thomas was many things: a social butterfly, trained the conversational arts and social graces, who traded punch recipes with prominent businessmen, politicians, and cultural figures; a consummate showman, as attested to by his signature flaming drink, the Blue Blazer; a hospitable restaurateur, whose saloons became the preferred establishment wherever he set up shop. But at heart, Jerry Thomas was a wanderer. As he developed his trade, he meandered across the country, lingering especially in frontier locales devoid of the customary comforts of the East—Jacksonian St. Louis or gold-addled San Francisco, for example. Eventually he settled though, returning to the crown jewel of the state of his birth, New York City. The product of his travels and tours, of his social connections and personal inventions, was published in 1862 as a way to spread the good news of the mixed drink, and perhaps also Thomas's already substantial fame. His work, *How to Mix Drinks: Or, The Bon Vivant's Companion*, was one of the first cocktail manuals ever published and quickly became the standard bearer for future bartenders and mixologists, a word popularized by Thomas.

More than simply an interesting footnote in American culinary and cultural history, Thomas's text and those that followed it demonstrate the complexity of alcohol culture at the birth of the cocktail. Hobbyists and non-professional scholars have taken a keen interest in the history of the cocktail and of Thomas, although this work tends to seek out originators, inventors, or authentically vintage recipes. Of course, some had to invent the Martini or the Tom Collins, though likely that person is lost to history. More answerable and, I think more interesting, is the question of how that genius bartender was enabled by broader economic forces, by the availability of ingredients, by the

infrastructure of the bar itself, by the very forces of global industrialization. Alcohol is at its core an extremely efficient condensation of perishable agricultural products. However, little scholarship has focused on the unique position of mixed-drinks either in American consumption patterns or in global economic systems. Because of the condition and circulation of the ingredients and infrastructure implicit in the form, I argue that cocktails derive first from the form of punch and, second, from the broader context of imperial capitalism, which influenced the development of both forms. In contrast to William Cronon's analysis of the meat industry in the nineteenth century or Mark Kurlansky's work on cod, cocktails were not *changed* by the introduction of capitalist systems, rather they only exist as a *direct consequence* of industrializing food systems.[1]

The history of mixed drinks and evolution of punch into cocktails illustrates the global inheritance of American drinking culture and the interconnectedness of European colonial projects. Both facilitate the transposition of imperial accumulation into domestic consumption. How did the products of empire translate themselves into pre-existing forms of food or drink in the metropole, or how did they change them? What is the relationship between the kinds of food that are available in a globalizing marketplace and the kinds of consumption that their availability makes possible? I argue that the social construction of taste is a central component of cultures of imperialism and is crucial to understanding the influence of empire on the metropole, and thereby the forms and histories of alcohol consumption. By combining more economic anthropological models

[1] William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York, NY: Norton, 1991); Mark Kurlansky, *Cod: A Biography of a Fish the Changed the World*, (New York, NY: Walker and Co, 1997).

with the contexts and methods of critical food studies, this research more closely examines the cultural products of empire and thereby seeks to better understand the interplay of capitalist production and cultural consumption implicit in colonial history. A more in-depth look at the production of alcohol itself in colonial and nineteenth century America, along with a genealogy of cocktails and their antecedents ending in the late-nineteenth-century urban barscape, allows for a broader argument about cultural accumulation through imperialism.

Alcohol in the World-System

When considering the politics of alcohol consumption, it is important to remember its liminal status between food and drug, both socially contingent categories. Like spices, hard alcohol especially walks the line between rational, necessary consumption and irrational hedonism. Its more ritualistic iterations, like wine or punch, are necessarily wrapped up in the context of food consumption, and usually a particularly classed kind of consumption. What would a fine French meal be without a fine French wine? This is where connoisseurs and arbiters of taste, as Amy Trubek discusses, make their mark in food studies. Even still, alcohol has obvious and incontrovertible psychoactive properties, placing it conversation with issues around drug consumption. Hard liquor in particular cannot really be a source of sustenance, as opposed to the grains from which it is made or from beer and wine, which can serve supplementary dietary roles. Overindulgence in hard alcohol can be deleterious to the body; if a body depends on alcohol for calories, as that of an addict might, it is very likely to experience negative

health outcomes in the event of withdrawal, including delerium tremens or death. As neither fully a food nor fully a drug, alcohol consumption is highly socially-mediated and dependent on the cultural status of foods, drugs, and commodities for its meaning.[2]

On the production side, alcohol has always been enmeshed with commodity status. At its core, hard alcohol is the most efficient way to bring to market bumper crops of any particular kind. As W.J. Rorabaugh points out, this quality is what led alcohol to its overwhelming popularity in the early republic. An Appalachian farmer could choose to sell corn in bushels, corn on legs in the form of pork, or corn in jugs in the form of moonshine whiskey. In her work, Sarah Hand Meacham shows how large-scale planters in the colonial Chesapeake were able to actualize a profit from the whiskey businesses by using slave labor to tend their labor-intensive stills, which required constant attention to the fire, the pressure of the pot, and the fermentation level of the mush. As a product, as a form of capital, hard liquor has been implicated in the operations of market and of capital from the beginning of its existence. And although that Appalachian farmer might be able to produce moonshine that could be bonded with finer brandies and sold at a substantial markup, his white lightning in a mason jar would never mean the same thing as the high-culture punch glass. That the popular forms of consumption for those products—punch and cocktails—would also be part of global capitalism is perhaps not so surprising.[3]

As a luxurious form of consumption, possible only atop the social pyramid, and as

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[2] Amy Trubek, *The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Paul Manning, *Semiotics of Drink and Drinking*, (London, UK: Continuum Books, 2012).

[3] W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic, an American Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Sarah Hand Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery: Alcohol, Gender, and Technology in the Colonial Chesapeake*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

a condensation of extreme agricultural surplus, alcohol production and consumption are necessarily tied into the development of global capitalism. The form feeds the function. As Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha argue, any post-colonialist interrogation of food or food systems must contend both with the logics and demands of capital, as well as with the racialized and gendered cultural systems derived from those logics. Similar to the way that suburban lawns require and recreate a particular kind of American post-war masculinity, alcohol arose from and then fueled an imperialist reorganization of the land into well-organized, mono-cropped, capitalist fields—a parcelling of the land, through masculinized labor, through racialized accumulation, through imperialist extraction. The Dutch in the East Indies, the English in the West Indies, or the Americans in the South Pacific; each relocated or decimated indigenous populations, each imported bonded labor, and each could return to their respective metropole to enjoy a punch made from the fruits of other people's labors.[4]

In the shift from punches to cocktails, there emerge a few key themes: the far-flung nature of the ingredients themselves, the growing importance of exotic liqueurs to burgeoning cocktails, and the increasing individualization of consumption patterns. Previous works on the history of American alcohol consumption have tended to focus on the role of serious over-consumption in the rise of Prohibition, the role of the saloon during the social upheaval of urbanization, or the masculinist appropriation of distillation technology. Few studies have attempted to illuminate what Americans actually drank and

[4] Arun Saldanha and Rachel Slocum, *Geographies of Race and Food: Fields, Bodies, and Markets*, (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2013).

why. David Wondrich has written extensively about the history of American cocktails and has also written one of the only large-scale studies of punch. Though his work is more popular than scholarly, Wondrich is one of the only people taking seriously what nineteenth century Americans actually drank, how they prepared it, and where it came from. Even Rorabaugh whose work, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, is one the pillars of American alcohol history, has paid little direct attention to specific consumption patterns. Rorabaugh instead focuses on the role of domestically produced alcohol, mostly whiskey and rum, both in spurring on nationalist sentiments in the early republic and in fueling what he terms a "national binge" in the Jacksonian period, which was only ended by increasing temperance advocacy and eventually Federal Prohibition.[5]

One of the few scholars to seriously consider the role of alcohol consumption preferences in shaping national or global history is Sidney Mintz. His foundational work, *Sweetness and Power*, looks at the role of sugar in fueling British colonialism and later the Industrial Revolution. He draws heavily from Eric Williams' previous work,

[5] For more general histories of American drink, see Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*; Mark Lender and James Kirby Martin, *Drinking in America: A History*, (New York: Free Press, 1982); or David Barr, *Drink: A Social History of America*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1999). For histories of the gathering places of drink, see Madelon Powers, *Faces along the Bar: Lore and Order in the Workingman's Saloon, 1870-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lee Willis, *Southern Prohibition: Race, Reform, and Public Life in Middle Florida*, 1821-1920, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); or Sharon V, Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). For histories of drink in the British North American periphery, see Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, (Montreal, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); or Julia Roberts, *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada*, (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2009). For works focusing on gender, domesticity, and drink, see Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*; or Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America*, 1870-1940. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). For works on the relationship between Native culture, sovereignty, and alcohol see William Unrau, *White Man's Wicked Water: The Alcohol Trade and Prohibition in Indian Country*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1996); or Peter Mancall, *Deadly Medicine: Indians and Alcohol in Early America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

Capitalism and Slavery, which argues that the profits from West Indian sugar plantations created the capital pools that enabled the Industrial Revolution. In Williams' detailed account, rum had a significant role to play in the global drama of industrialization and the birth of modern capitalism, but it is only useful insofar as it makes money. As an anthropologist, Mintz emphasizes the processes of taste and taste-making in his Atlantic world. As he argues, Englishmen and women's national sweet tooth was certainly a product of their position within a global empire, but their newfound demand also fueled the growth of the empire. The taste of power and power of taste were inextricably linked.[6]

Mintz's work contrasts markedly with the many other global histories of capitalism, which tend to focus more on the longue durée of historical shifts in economies. This approach, global systems analysis, as articulated by Fernand Braudel and Immaneul Wallerstein, is one of the dominant forms of economic history. It describes how products and people from across the world came to coalesce in European world-economies, primarily in order to untangle the contributing forces to British Industrial Revolution and thereby the history of global capitalism. Their main concern is the flow of good from the periphery into the core and the resultant forms of European political and economic organization. These are of course important works in understanding the role of European global expansion in the early modern period, roughly the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries; however, in focusing more on the supply-side, these studies give us

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[6] Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (New York, NY: Capricorn Books, 1944); Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York, NY: Viking, 1985).

little ground from which to examine the social processes of taste-making at play in the development of European demand.[7]

Punches and cocktails brought ingredients from across the world into salons and barrooms of the European elite. They collapsed the distance between the periphery and the core, creating a kind of consumption that was only possible in the context of European and American expansion, but was also implicit in fueling that expansion, mirroring Mintz's argument. More geographic and anthropological approaches to the commodity can be helpful in bridging the divide between supply and demand, especially those developed by Arjun Appadurai. In his work on commodity chains, "The Social Life of Things," he argues that classical Marxist takes on the commodity have too long valued the static properties of property. That is, once something becomes a commodity, something designed for global trade, is it always that and nothing more. Instead, Appadurai asserts that things can move through multiple states as they move through multiple contexts—what is a commodity here is not necessarily a commodity there. While their environments may change, the principal quality of the commodity remains the same: it is a thing in a context "in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is its most socially relevant feature." For the cocktail specifically, it has three constituent parts: the alcohols, which are the condensation of agricultural surplus; the recipe, which is a socially-determined formula that exists in an inextricable relationship with the drink itself; and the bar, the commercialized context in which

[7] Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th century*, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1982); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1976).

cocktails first emerge and which they retain as a form. In either a classical Marxian view, as used by Wallerstein, or in Appadurai's analytical framework, a cocktail is a commodity made of commodities and exchanged in a commercialized setting. In this way, some coherent understanding of the shape of global capitalism is necessary to understanding the social life of punches and cocktails.[8]

Preserving Class

Like any technology, alcohol and distillation did not exist in a social vacuum that only considered the possible applications of this technology. Rather, the technological infrastructure implicit in distillation has long raised questions about who can and should produce alcohol, who can and should participate in global markets. Beer and wine, which preexisted hard alcohol and which required only primary fermentation, had generally been considered feminized, domestic work in Europe and the America's—a kind of preservation technique akin to canning. Some of the first kinds of European punches mirror this need to extend the lives of seasonal products; however, little knowledge of the land and the seasons was relevant to the creation of nineteenth century cocktails. As punches faded from Western drinkways, so did their function as local kinds of preservation. As cocktails rose to cultural preeminence, so did their extension of global commodity chains into high-class salons and saloons.

In her study of the spread of distillation technology through Enlightenment

[8] Arjun Appadurai, "The Social Life of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Europe to its periphery in the colonial Chesapeake from its home the Islamic world, Meacham contrasts the masculinist rhetoric around distilling with the feminized place of beer, wine, and cider, which were considered women's kitchen work.[9] The production of all of these forms of alcohol were quite labor intensive; to make wine or cider, you would have to pick many bushels of fruit (in season, preferably on a dry day), clean them, process them and extract their juice (the difficulty of which would vary depending on the fruit in question), add sugar and yeast, and bottle or cask the mixture. For example, Mary Randolph's recipe for currant wine from 1838 in *The Virginia Housewife*,

> Gather full ripe currants on a dry day, pick them from the stalks, and weigh them; then crush them with your hands, leaving none whole; for every two pounds of currants put one quart of water; stir all well together, and let it stand three hours, and strain the liquor [juice] through a sieve; then for every three pounds of currants, put one pound of powdered loaf sugar; stir it till the sugar is dissolved, boil it, and keep skimming it, as long as any scum will rise [this would take many hours]; let it stand sixteen hours to cool, before you put it in the cask—stop it very close.[10]

She goes on to detail how long to let it sit in the cask, undergoing primary fermentation, before bottling. "This is a pleasant and cheap wine—and if properly made, will keep good for many years. It makes an agreeable beverage for the sick, when mixed with water." Randolph made her recipe customizable to whatever quantity of fruit a woman might have access too, thereby giving a clear sense of how it fits into a broader system of home resource management, and indicating how to adapt the usage of the wine to the condition of the people in the house. In order for a reader to use this recipe, they would

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[9] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*.
[10] Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife: Or, Methodical Cook*, (Baltimore, MD: Plaskitt, Fite, & Co., 1838) 171-172.

have to have a sophisticated knowledge of their local plants and weather patterns. She would have to the keep the temperature steady on a wood stove, she would have to monitor the primary fermentation of the mixture while it was casked, and then she would have to prevent secondary fermentation once it was in the bottle—unless she wanted them to explode, thereby wasting the currants, the bottle, and her precious time.[11]

Wine was a convenient way to store the bounty of the harvest, reducing fruit by about half its quantity, depending on how much sweetener was added. Were Mary Randolph to distill that same bushel of currants into an eau-de-vie, instead of around 25 gallons of wine at about 16% alcohol by volume (ABV), she would have around 4 gallons of brandy at about 40% ABV. While Randolph's set-up for wine may seem complicated to a modern home cook—requiring a kettle of at least 10 gallons, a stove or hearth big enough to fit the kettle, a mortar and pestle to pound the sugar, a wooden cask or access to a cooper, corks, and bottles—Christian Schultz's directions for distilling require even more infrastructure, most of which would be too highly specialized for any alternative uses in a home. Copper worms, concurbits, furnaces, thermometers, and filters would be necessary, in addition to nearly everything Randolph used.[12]

Published in the same publishing house as Jerry Thomas's work and sometimes printed as a companion to Thomas's book, Schultz's guide to producing cordials and liqueurs advertises itself as a guide "after the most common and approved methods now used in the distillation of liquors and beverages, designed for the special use of

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[11] Meacham, *Every Home a Distillery*; Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife*, 172.
[12] Christian Schultz, *Manual for the Manufacture of Cordials, Liquors, Fancy Syrups, etc*. (New York, NY: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1862).

manufacturers, dealers in wines and spirits, grocers, tavern keepers, and private families." Schultz also boasts of his credentials as a professor and as a "practical chemist and distiller." In contrast to Randolph's domestic preservation of local bumper crops, Schultz's manual speaks of science, trade, and foreign ingredients used in recipes for "Aqua del Paradiso" or "Creme de Martinique (Martinique Cream)." He intentionally omits some steps of the general preparation, arguing that "a well informed and practical druggist will at once be able to understand, and properly furnish, the articles contained in each recipe." Topping off his scientized and sterile discourse, Schultz offers only one mention of seasons, botany, or agriculture in the book's nearly 150 pages, towards the end of his preface: "Fruit syrups, such as raspberry, strawberry, etc., are prepared in summer; others, such as orgeat, gum, sasparilla, etc., at any season."[13]

From the early modern period to around the publication of *The Bon Vivant* and Schultz's manual, punch dominated European and American high-class drinking. David Wondrich has described punch as an essentially amateur form, in that it was usually served either in private homes or exclusive social clubs. Its home was in the estates of the wealthy, who could afford to keep a surplus of these liquors and liqueurs on hand, or in their social clubs, a proxy for their home-space. This was not something that Mary Randolph was making. Given this domestic setting, punch was highly sensitive to the consumer demands of class and home-making. While some poorer Englishmen and Americans drank punch made from diluted Medford Rum or adulterated potcheen, for the most part, it was an upper-class affair. The ingredients were prohibitively expensive (as

[13] Schultz, *Manual for the Manufacture of Cordials*, 1-7.

compared to ale or similar beverages), the assembly tedious, and the tools—bowls, bottles, and cups—complex and cumbersome, to say the least. Ingredients could include wine from France or Germany, rum from the Caribbean or the US, arrack from Java or Goa, tea from China or India, or ambergris from the journeys in between. The only required ingredients were imported lemons and highly refined sugars. In wealthy European homes, in all its opulence and luxury, punch brought together the most delectable products of empire.[14]

The communitarian form of punch likely has its roots in rural northern Europe. Many punch recipes included large amounts of eggs and dairy products, both highly perishable products in the days before refrigeration. Before the late-nineteenth century, eggs were a seasonal product, and not easily available when it was not spring or when one was not near a chicken. Similarly, milk deteriorated quickly before pasteurization or the invention of chemical preservatives. One such recipe of Thomas's for English Milk Punch, typical of these kinds of fat-forward beverages, combined two quarts of water, one quart of milk, one quart of rum, and two quarts of brandy. The mixture, which he describes as a "seductive and nectarous drink," was allowed to sit for an hour before being strained of its curd; the recipe contained specific instructions to "not suffer any one of delicate appetite to see the melange in its present state, as the sight might create a distaste for the punch when perfected."[15] The final yield was six bottles of punch to be used at a later date. The reliance on dairy products, the Continental brandy, the extension

[14] Thomas, *Bon Vivant's Companion*; Wondrich, *Punch*.
[15] Thomas, *Bon Vivant's Companion*, 15.

of shelf-life through bottling, and the notable absence of ice all indicate that this form was created by people in a rural, European setting with relatively little access to markets. The tactic of bottling here is also interesting, given that glass bottles at this time were prohibitively expensive for most people, further inscribing punch's upper-class origins.[16]

Around the time that milk punches were likely peaking in popularity, the word 'cocktail' first appeared in the English language in 1806 in a rural New England newspaper. The editor was responding to letter asking for a clarification of this new drink, and he described it as "a stimulating liquor, composed of *spirits* of any kind, *sugar*, *water*, and *bitters*—vulgarly called a *bittered sling* [sic]." He wryly continues, "[it] is supposed to be an excellent electioneering potion, inasmuch as it renders the heart stout and bold, at the same time that it fuddles the head. It is said also to be of great use to the democratic candidate: because, a person, having swallowed a glass of it, is ready to swallow anything else.[17]" Thomas introduces his small section on cocktails with this explanation: "the 'Cocktail' is a modern invention, and is generally used on fishing and other sporting parties, although some *patients* insist that it is good in the morning as a tonic."[18] In this description of the cocktail, it is more of a template than a particular formula. Moreover, Thomas's instructions to bottle the mixture and his description of it in the social world of hunting and fishing parties—leisure activities of the wealthy—put this earliest kind of cocktail in the same economic setting as Randolph's wine and the same communal milieu as earlier punches.

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[16] Wondrich, *Imbibe!*, 46; for bottles, see Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 37; Susanne Freidberg, "The Triumph of the Egg," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50.2 (April 2008), 400–423.
[17] *The Balance, or the Columbian Respository*, Hudson, New York, May 13, 1806.
[18] Jerry Thomas, *The Bon Vivant's Companion*, 49.

Buying a Taste of Paradise

In the shift from punches to cocktails, the form and the context of high class drinking shifted from the private home to the public bar, where pleasure and leisure could be had—for a price. Once more exotic ingredients started becoming available, the old milk punches waned in popularity, while more ornate drinks that incorporated ostentatiously expensive ingredients became a more obvious marker of distinction, either of class or of taste. One thing that did not change as punches fractured into a thousand tiny tipples was that each of these forms and the contexts in which they existed maintained the prerogative of wealthy imperialists to consume as they pleased.

In *The Oxford Nightcap: Being a Collection of Receipts for Making Various Beverages Used in the University*, originally published in 1827 and revised in 1871, features exclusively communal drinks. To what extent that format represents early-modern English drinking patterns versus the drinking patterns of college it debatable, though it is likely a mixture of both. Posset, which the authors of the collection describe as an ancient recipe, is made of boiled, sweetened milk (the process of which would break full-fat milk), which was then curdled with brandy or wine. The author of the collection points out that even the esteemed Shakespeare wrote about the drink—Lady Macbeth poisoned Duncan's guards' possets (II: 2). He (presumably) then took a page from the Bard himself and recorded this august recipe in verse:

Posset.
From fam'd Barbadoes, on the western main,
Fetch sugar, ounces four; fetch sack from Spain

A pint; and from the Eastern Indian coast
Nutmeg, the glory of our northern toast;
O'er the flaming coals let them together heat,
Till the all-conquering sack dissolve the sweet'
O'er such another fire put eggs just ten,
New born from tread of cock and rump of hen;
Stir them with steady hand and conscience pricking,
To see th' untimely end of ten fine chicken:
From shining shelf take down the brazen skellet,
A quart of milk from the gentle cow will fill it;
When boiled and cold, put milk and sack to eggs;
Unite them firmly like the triple league,
And on the fire let them together dwell
Till miss sing twice—you must not kiss and tell:
Each lad and lass take up a silver spoon;
And fall on fiercely like a starved dragoon.

Sir Fleetwood Fletcher's Sack Posset[19]

In this drink, one can see the both the continuation of an older style, both in its ingredients and in its poetic form, and a very modern sense of globalization in locating the origins of sugar and spices from the capitalist periphery, "fam'd Barbadoes" and East Indies nutmeg. These exotic objects travel through the routes of empire to Oxford, one of the intellectual pinnacles of England, where they are combined with newborn eggs and fresh drawn milk. The resulting mixture is consumed by a mixed-gender company with their well-chosen, symbolically laden silver spoons.

However, these milk punches tended to be seen as old-fashioned even by Jerry Thomas's time. In contrast to the more rural, dairy-based punches, are the opulent, luxurious, almost baroque, imperial punches. These mixtures blended ostentatiously expensive arrack or exotic teas with sunny Curaçao, named for its colonial island origins.

[19] Richard Cook, *The Oxford Nightcap: Being a Collection of Receipts for Making Various Beverages Used in the University*, (Oxford, UK: Slatter and Rose, originally published 1827, reprint 1871), 26.

Through these, a luxuriant European drinker could experience the taste of travel, the terroir of imperialist oceans.[20] The most obvious iteration of this impulse are those punches that incorporated ambergris. An excretion of sperm whale cholesterol, a found object, ambergris could only be collected from the ocean. It was extremely expensive, commonly used as a fixative in perfumes, and occasionally imbibed, as the very symbol of oceanic extraction. The final recipe in Christian Schultz's *Manual for the Manufacture of Cordials, Liquors, Fancy Syrups, etc*., which he notes "the same being adapted to the trade of the United States and the Canadas," features one such punch recipe.

> 463. Yankee Punch
>
> Macerate 3 ounces of sliced pineapple, 6 grains of vanilla, 1 grain of ambergris (rubbed with a little sugar) in 1 pint of the strongest pale brandy for a few hours, being careful to shake it frequently during that time (see No. 5) [instructions for maceration]; then strain through a jelly bag, squeezing the bag so as to get all the liquid, and add of lemon juice 1 pint, 1 bottle of lemon syrup, 1 bottle of claret or port wine, and 1/2 lb. of sugar dissolved in 1 1/2 pint [sic] of boiling water.[21]

It is worth noting that this punch, associated with the American nation, relied on the flavoring of the pineapple, that signature fruit of Oceania. While Schlutz mostly focuses on opulent oils, liqueurs, and syrups, incorporating ingredients such as neroli, myrrh, or grains of paradise, he does include a few, streamlined punch recipes. Earlier in the text, he includes a recipe to fake the scent of ambergris, indicating both its importance and its scarcity. In this final recipe, Schultz surpasses the luxury ensconced in the rest of the text,

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[20] The literature on the manifestations of vicarious or imagined colonial travel is vast; a few helpful sources include Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Tales of Dark-skinned Women: Race, Gender, and Global Culture*, (London: University College London, 1998; Katherine McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

[21] Schultz, *The Manufacture of Cordials*, 248.

giving the reader a true taste of paradise through this unique product of maritime trade and travel, though hopefully the real kind.[22]

All of these impulses—to collapse the products of the periphery into the metropole, to demonstrate distinction, to preserve the elite state of taste—are captured in one particular concoction: Royal Punch. The drink appears in the first edition of *The Bon Vivant* and combines a remarkable variety of alcohols, liqueurs, and flavorings. It is not sourced to anyone in particular, as some of the recipes are; and, it is very unlikely that Thomas himself wrote it, as its composition indicates Regency England, and not Jacksonian St. Louis, as a much more likely origin.

> 58. Royal Punch
> 1 pint of hot green tea.
> ½ do. [ditto] brandy.
> ½ do. Jamaica rum.
> 1 wine-glass of Curaçoa.
> 1 do. do. arrack.
> Juice of two limes.
> A thin slice of lemon.
> White sugar to taste.
> 1 gill of warm calf's-foot jelly.
> To be drunk as hot as possible.
>
> This is a composition worthy of a king, and the materials are admirably blended; the inebriating effects of the spirits deadened by the tea, whilst the jelly softens the mixture, and destroys the acrimony of the acid and sugar. The whites of a couple of eggs well beat up to a froth, may be substituted for the jelly where that is not at hand. If the punch is too strong, add more green tea to taste.[23]

In this recipe, we see two distinct sets of colonial products wrapped up in conventional

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[22] Amy Stewart, *The Drunken Botanist: The Plants that Create the World's Great Drinks*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2013); Schultz, *The Manufacture of Cordials*.
[23] Thomas, *Bon Vivant's Companion*, 32-33.

Continental forms—those being the calf's foot jelly and the punch itself. Interestingly, we see very little that is specifically American here. Why would Thomas include a Regency-era punch, named for the monarchy that his country had rejected fewer than one hundred years prior? One might imagine that, especially in St. Louis or New Orleans, which had more recently experienced attacks by the British in the War of 1812, a "Royal" punch might not be well received. Nevertheless, it was included with other American drinks in Thomas's collection, with the specific aim of making these confined, upper-class drinks more accessible to a much wider audience. It is this incongruity that I find most generative in American alcohol history. It is not enough to say that American elites were co-opting European cultural practices in their performance of class—that punch is just another example of class-specific taste-making. Specifically what were they co-opting, and what kind of baggage came along with it? How does a punch with little relation to existing American markets wind up in a seminal text on American alcohol, and what then are its unconscious importations and implications? A closer look at the composition and histories of these groups of Dutch colonial and English colonial products can show some answers to these questions.

The first set of colonially derived products and the ones furthest from the American context are all Dutch in origin: arrack, green tea, and Curacao. Arrack, which is a distilled alcohol which was a precursor to rum, was one of the earliest alcohol imports into Europe. It arose from the Dutch East India Company's sixteenth-century settlement of Southeast Asia, especially around their capital, Batavia, now known as Jakarta. The Dutch depopulated the surrounding islands through genocide, forced

migration, and enslavement in order to set up one of the earliest sugar colonies; because arrack is historically distilled from Indonesian crops, such as red rice, coconut sap, and sugar cane mash, it indicates that arrack probably derives from the foodways of local enslaved people. The Dutch started importing Batavia arrack into the homeland, along with their sugar and the green tea they acquired from colonial Chinese merchants, and arrack punch became incredibly popular throughout Europe. By the nineteenth century, improvements in distillation technology and the proliferation of newer alcohols had mostly pushed arrack out of the market. As Thomas writes in *The Bon Vivant*, "most of the arrack imported into this country is distilled from rice, and comes from Batavia. It is but little used in America, except to flavor punch."[24]

Around the time the Dutch were being pushed out of Southeast Asia by the British East India Company, they started expanding in the Caribbean, including the island of Curacao, primarily used as a distribution point for the slaves imported from West Africa. While the Dutch transformed human bodies into international unit of exchange, they also transformed a local, thick-skinned, bitter orange into the liqueur that now bears the island's name. These three ingredients—base, alcohol, and liqueur—form what economists might call a consumption cluster, things commonly consumed together. This pairing of green tea, arrack, and curacao demonstrates the lasting influence of Dutch colonialism on broader European foodways. The capital accumulated through the Dutch

[24] Leonard Blussé, *Visible Cities: Canton, Nagasaki,and Batavia and the Coming of the Americans*, (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008; originally published Riverton, NJ: Foris Publications, 1986); Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters: The Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008);Thomas, *Bon Vivant's Companion*, 20.

imperial periphery solidified in patterns of alcohol consumption.[25]

The second colonial consumption cluster is a bit more familiar to American alcohol history, given that it comes from the British Atlantic world: rum, lime, and white sugar. Rum, of course, is the distilled product of molasses, which is itself a byproduct of sugar refining. Early refining technology was very inefficient and produced a substantial amount of molasses, which was traded around the British colonies and much of which eventually became rum. Jamaica rum, the type called for in Royal Punch, was more expensive, higher grade, and better aged than its inferior North American cousins. Either type would likely have been entirely slave-produced—growing, threshing, refining, distilling, each step of the incredibly labor-intensive process performed by enslaved African and indigenous bodies. Some Caribbean molasses might be sent to the North American colonies, where it might go into Boston baked beans or Virginia pecan pie; some might be condensed and shipped to England as Jamaica rum, and yet more might be casked raw in order to be further refined in white sugar, Mintz's ultimate signifier of empire. Accompanying these various tools of capital on their journey would also be that emblem and savior of the British Navy, the lime, which flourished after it was introduced during the Spanish depopulation of the Caribbean and which the British harvested in great numbers in the West Indies.[26]

The combination of all three ingredients—rum, white sugar, and lime—is a direct product of the British Atlantic empire, thereby placing Royal Punch within the same

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[25] Karwan Fatah-Black, "Orangism, Patriotism, and Slavery in Curaçao, 1795–1796," *International Review of Social History,* 58, no. Supplement S21 (December 2013): 35–60.
[26] Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*.

historical processes as the British Industrial Revolution and modern industrial capitalism. In this one recipe, we can see the hybridization of two historical consumption clusters—first the English, then the Dutch—following classical economic history's lineage of world powers, and then the translation of that lineage into is the canon of American drinking practices. This through-line of empire, this genealogy of punch, shows American cultural accumulation through global imperialism.

A Genealogy of Taste

Although the taste clusters developed through the forms of punches in their imperialist context survived and thrived in the age of the cocktail, there is one particular taste that distinguishes nearly all cocktails from their expansive predecessors: ice. Ice had been available to punch-drinkers, but it did not have the same level of importance it did in cocktails, which almost exclusively relied on the availability of ice. The incorporation of ice into American drinking palates was the result of significant advances in capitalist structures of harvesting, shipping, and later manufacturing the frozen treat. Following ice from its status as a newcomer in Jerry Thomas's time to its banal obfuscation as an uninteresting object of everyday life by the turn of the century shows the evolution of cocktails as a form and their influence in American taste-making.

Although enthusiasts point to the Martini or the Manhattan as one of the earliest cocktails—both of which appear in Harry Johnson's 1882 work and in Thomas's posthumous 1887 revised edition—I would proffer the Knickerbocker as one of the earliest single-serving, named drinks. The name appears in the earliest edition of

Thomas's manual, and nearly every subsequent drink guide in the nineteenth-century. Like modern cocktails and unlike rural punches, the Knickerbocker relies on ice, though the centrality and emphasis on ice changed in later interpretations of the recipe. In Thomas's earliest version, the recipe appears in the penultimate section of the books, "Fancy Drinks" (the final section being saved for "Temperance Drinks"), indicating its relative obscurity in relation to the hallowed, traditional punches that dominate the first half of the book. In Harry Johnson's manual, produced at a time when cocktails were socially ascendant, though punch was still somewhat relevant to drinking culture, the Knickerbocker is one of the first recipes, only a few pages after the Martini and the Manhattan.

> Knickerbocker.
> (Use large bar glass.)
> 2 table-spoonfuls of raspberry syrup;
> 2 dashes of lemon juice;
> 1 slice pine-apple;
> 1 slice orange;
> 1 wine-glassful of St. Croix rum;
> 1/2 wine-glass of curacao.
> Then fill the glass with fine-shaved ice; stir or shake well, and dress with fruit in season; serve with a straw.[27]

Johnson's recipe is unusual for its addition of fruit slices, though the basic ingredients—raspberry syrup, medium-grade rum, and curacao—are the same in each author's version, with slight tweaking of the ratios. Three different versions of these recipes in context with their particular bar book show distinct relationships to ice, with the older recipes tending to be more efficient and conservative of their ice, and therefore to the concepts of

[27] Johnson, *Bartender's Manual*, 170.

capitalist preservation and infrastructure.

While naming practices are perhaps the most obvious defining characteristic of cocktails, the reliance on ice and individual cooling is unique in the drinking milieu of the time. The whole first half of Johnson's book is devoted to the detailed work of owning and operating a bar, and in the small section, "How to Handle Ice," Johnson describes how to properly weigh ice, wash it, and store it. He writes that he prefers to buy artificial ice though, as it "comes in the same regular size, therefore, [is] easier to pack and place away, [is] more convenient and more wholesome, as it does not contain any impurities."[28] Artificial ice, which was created through artificial refrigeration, was just becoming economically feasible in large parts of the country at Johnson was writing. Natural ice, which was harvested from lakes and rivers during the winter and stored in cold houses for future sale, had long been available, but was impractical for such luxurious consumption as exemplified in the Knickerbocker. Johnson was on the cutting edge of refrigerative technology, beginning to buy artificial ice in the early 1880's, even before the Chicago meat markets did.[29]

In his recipe, Johnson uses his carefully prepared ice in serving the drink, although it is unclear how much would remain, depending on the reader's choice whether to stir or shake. Stirring the drink would preserve more of the ice shavings, and shaking it would cool the drink more quickly and more thoroughly, though most the ice would melt in the process. In either case, this recipe is very economically sensitive to the ice—unlike

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[28] Johnson, *Bartender's Manual*, 127.
[29] Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*; Susanne Freidberg, *Fresh: A Perishable History*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

the version that appears in the 1887 *Bon Vivant*, which advises the mixer to use plenty of shaved ice, "shake up well, and strain into a cocktail glass."[30] This technique would result in both a dilution of the drink and would use up more ice. Nearly all of the individual drinks of the 1887 *Bon Vivant*, except the older toddies and nogs, instruct the reader to vigorous shake the drink, thereby expending theretofore unheard of amounts of ice. Furthermore, this newer Knickerbocker is strained into a new glass, implying an even greater capital investment in the bar itself—requiring an increase in the bartender's labor, in the on-hand glassware, and in the washing.

Though the Knickerbocker was presented as anathema to Thomas's traditional punches in 1862, and then foregrounded in Johnson's cocktail section of 1882, but the time that William Schmidt published his bar book in 1891, it was seen as old-fashioned. In his manual, Schmidt features far more named drinks, such as "The Black Rose," "The Weeper's Joy," or "The Brain Duster." Considerably more of his drinks are shaken, and his recipes and much more standardized in format and narrative. By the time that *The Flowing Bowl* was published, the divide between punches and cocktails was complete. "The drinks themselves are divided into two great groups, such as served and serviceable at the bar only, which are enumerated under the heading 'Mixed Drinks,' and such as might be desirable for societies and larger companies, as punches, bowls, etc."[31] (*Flowing Bowl*, xvi) The Knickerbocker appears at the end of the mixed drinks section, with the older toddies and slings.

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[30] Thomas, *Bartender's Guide*, 26.
[31] Schmidt, *The Flowing Bowl*, xvi.

170. The Knickerbocker.
The juice of half a lime or lemon in a glass,
3 dashes of raspberry syrup,
1 wineglassful of Jamaica rum,
1 dash curacao,
A little cracked ice.
Stir this well; strain, and serve in a fancy glass.[32]

In this collection, the mark of old-fashioned taste is a semi-cooled drink. While, like all of Schmidt's drinks, his Knickerbocker is mixed in one glass and presented in another, keeping the infrastructural innovation of Johnson, here he hearkens back to a misty past, the days of the Knickerbockers perhaps, where citrus and ice were scarce, and cocktails were served lukewarm.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the US had firmly transitioned from the periphery of the British Empire to the center of its own, new empire. Thomas saw this nascent empire for himself, as he plied his trade in New York, New Orleans, San Francisco, and St. Louis. It's impossible to know where exactly on that journey any particular punch came in, but we do know that in his edition, the overwhelming punch section dominates the entire first half of the book. However, Thomas's editors, who released posthumous re-editions of *The Bon Vivant* in 1876 and 1887, did not share this view. By 1887, punches were shunted off, nearly to the end of the book, as individual named drinks, what we now know as cocktails, had by then taken primacy among American drinkers.[33]

The commercial setting of the bar fundamentally altered the relationship between the consumer and the maker of the drink. Throughout the original edition of *The Bon*

[32] Schmidt, *The Flowing Bowl*, 164.
[33] Jerry Thomas, *The Bon Vivant's Companion*;

Vivant, the recipes switch between referring to domestic social settings, as for punches, and commercial bar settings, as for individual drinks. Thomas references esteemed politicians, writers, and other cultural figures in sourcing his punch recipes, legitimized the drinks through their connection to a particularly classed, gendered, and racialized domestic setting. One might imagine Thomas himself cavorting with these gentlemen. By the time that William Schmidt's cocktail book, *The Flowing Bowl*, published by Samuel Clement's new publishing house, was released, his role as a bartender was much clearer than it had been in Jerry Thomas's time. Harry Johnson seemed clearer on this, though still somewhat baffled by how to socially interact with punches. He wrote that bartenders should never fraternize with their customers but should maintain a strict professionalism—something that punches as a form simply did not support. One doesn't imagine Johnson cavorting anywhere. Schmidt, on the other side of the transition from punches to cocktails, wrote "as good eating depends on the cook, so good drinking depends on the expert barkeep." His role behind the counter was to mediate his customers' tastes and frame their ludic experience. His cocktails existed solely in a commercialized context.[34]

Conclusion

The bartenders of the late nineteenth century and their drinks were selling

[34] Jerry Thomas, *The Bon Vivant's Companion*; Jerry Thomas, *Bartender's Guide; or, How To Mix All Kinds of Plain and Fancy Drinks*, originally published (New York, NY: Dick and FItzgerald, 1887), reprint (Lexington, KY: Mudwell Books, 2012); Harry Johnson, *Bartender's Manual; Or How to Mix Drinks* (Newark, NJ: Charles E. Graham & Co., 1887); William Schmidt, *The Flowing Bowl: When and What to Drink : Full Instructions How to Prepare, Mix, and Serve Beverages*, (New Orleans, LA: C.L. Webster, 1891), quote on 110.

pleasure and class, a civilized hedonism. As the choppy seas of temperance reform and Prohibition churned around them, these men argued for the proper place of drinking and luxury, enabled by a growing imperialist influence. As William Schmidt wrote in his introduction to his cocktail section, "it must be borne in mind: Drinking is an art, and it requires practice to know how to drink, what to drink, and when to drink. Who but a cannibal would not prefer his viands prepared in a palatable form?"[35] As cannibals were to civilization, so were the intemperate—drunkards and prohibitionists alike—to a well-trained barkeep and his well-heeled customers. Unlike the cannibal, that archetypical representation of savagery and the misuse of desire, these drinkers knew how to properly enjoy the fruits of paradise.

In the shift from punches to cocktail, we see the appetites of those high-class drinkers spurring on a quest for empire. As Jack Turner wrote in his study of the economic erotics of spices and the spice trade, although spices are nutritionally useless, they have been central to some of the most contested historical phenomenon of the modern world—the mass out-migration of adventuresome Europeans and their subsequent exploitation of much of the rest of the world.[36] Over a good Yankee punch of pineapple and ambergris, swilling a fine Jamaica rum with lime and curacao, or marveling at the frost on a silver goblet of mint julep, the West's high class drinkers fueled the growth of global empire, all in search of a good drink.

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[35] Schmidt, *The Flowing Bowl*, 111.
[36] Jack Turner, *Spice: The History of a Temptation*, (New York, NY: Knopf, 2004), xvii.

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